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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 006799

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SUBJECT: SHALOM OUTLINES GOI REACTION TO ATTACK, BLAMES PA
PRESIDENT ABBAS

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

1. (C) Summary: Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom told the Ambassador December 6 that in response to the December 5 Netanya terrorist attack, the Security Cabinet decided to cancel special travel privileges for Palestinian VIPs, to resume targeted killings, and to combat terrorism and arms smuggling into Gaza by other security measures. Shalom called on the international community to pressure Abbas to act against terrorist infrastructure. On other matters, Shalom expressed satisfaction with the resumption of the Strategic Dialogue between Israel and the U.S., and underlined his view that the USG must act to prevent Iran from producing nuclear weapons. Within the context of his recent visit to Tunisia, Shalom noted the GOI's intention of developing ties with Muslim countries, including through "trilateral" relationships involving third parties. Building on an idea presented by MFA's DG Ron Prosor during the November 28 Strategic Dialogue meeting in Washington, Shalom asked for USG assistance in developing a "trilateral" relationship with Lebanon. The Ambassador asked for a more detailed presentation of GOI thinking in this area, but also offered to explore possibilities on the U.S. side. Shalom also took credit for solving the tax issue concerning the Jerusalem Consulate annex construction project and asked the Ambassador to inform the Secretary. End summary.

Shalom: Israel Will "Do The Work" if Abbas Will Not

2. (C) Shalom met with the Ambassador directly after he participated in a special morning Security Cabinet meeting to discuss what actions the GOI should take in response to the Netanya terrorist attack in which five people were killed and over 50 wounded. The meeting began with a short press availability during which Shalom -- in Likud candidate mode -- criticized the PA for not acting against terrorism and discussed measures the Security Cabinet decided to take in response to the attack. He called on the international community to pressure PA President Mahmud Abbas to act against terrorism. Shalom said that the GOI will convey information to the USG and other countries on what he claimed is a large amount of weapons that have been smuggled into Gaza from Egypt since Israel left Gaza in August. He also criticized Syria for what he said is its role in supporting terrorism in Israel. As part of the press availability, the Ambassador offered his condolences to the Israeli people and stressed that such attacks not only take innocent Israeli lives, but damage the hopes and dreams of the Palestinian people.

3. (C) Shalom told the Ambassador that the Netanya attack had "damaged efforts to move forward" with the Palestinians. He noted that when he was in Tunisia in mid-November, he met twice with PA President Abbas and "begged him" to do something against terrorism. Shalom said that Abbas complained about being too weak to act. Comparing Abbas to Arafat, who, Shalom claimed, used the same complaint, Shalom also noted that Abbas refuses to bar Hamas from the upcoming Palestinian Legislative Council elections. Shalom outlined what decisions the Security Cabinet took earlier in the day as a response to the attack, including:

-- canceling Palestinian VIP travel privileges;
-- restricting access into Israel of Palestinian workers;
-- resuming "targeted killings" of "ticking bombs."

4. (C) Commenting that the situation "looks very bad," Shalom said that "it's election time now...everyone's blaming Sharon for leaving Gaza and not getting anything in return." The Ambassador noted that all indications show that the perpetrator of the Netanya attack was from the West Bank and not from Gaza.

Strategic Dialogue

5. (C) Turning to other matters, Shalom expressed satisfaction with the resumption of the U.S.-Israel Strategic Dialogue in Washington last week. He said he is happy that the next meeting will take place in Israel. Shalom underlined his concern over Iran's nuclear program. Asserting that Iran is "very close" to producing nuclear

weapons, Shalom cautioned that the USG should not "subcontract out" to other countries the job of dealing with Iran.

GOI Seeks Trilateral Plans

16. (C) Discussing the GOI's ongoing efforts to enhance relations with certain Muslim countries, Shalom said he was very well received in Tunisia. Shalom said he was treated as a head of state, and joked that it was as if they already knew his future. Shalom said that at a state dinner, he sat with several Muslim heads of state, including the presidents of Algeria, Sudan, and Mauritania. He said he also met with the president of Mauritania and the foreign minister of Tunisia. In recounting some of the Muslim countries with which the GOI had made contact, Shalom listed Pakistan, Indonesia, Qatar, and Oman, and said that he will "keep confidential" the names of other countries. He said that

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Saudi Arabia is one of the only countries with which Israel has had no contact. The GOI has noted a difference in relations with Pakistan since his meeting with Pakistan's foreign minister, with Israeli diplomats in various countries now receiving social invitations from Pakistani embassies. Shalom said that Israel once had a channel with Malaysia, and suggested that USG assistance could be useful in re-establishing contact. Shalom also claimed that Iraq has been interested in establishing ties to Israel -- more so than vice versa.

17. (C) In response to the Ambassador's query as to whether the GOI has a larger plan to develop relations with Muslim countries, Shalom said that the GOI is now using "trilateral" approaches, whereby it provides technological, agricultural or other support to Muslim countries with the financial support of a third country or party whose involvement provides necessary political cover. He gave the example of Israel providing Tunisia with technological support for a project that is being funded by UNESCO. He also mentioned a project the GOI is doing in Egypt funded by the Japanese Government. Shalom said that it is easier for Israel to undertake projects in Muslim countries through third parties. Building on an idea presented by MFA's DG Ron Prosor during the November 28 Strategic Dialogue meeting in Washington, Shalom asked whether the USG could help establish a trilateral dialog with Lebanon. He asked the Ambassador for project ideas and personal contacts in Lebanon with whom the GOI could meet "outside the region" to discuss such a project. The Ambassador asked for more details of the GOI's thinking in this area and said that he would consult within the USG on how we might be of help.

Other Issues

18. (C) Turning to other matters, Shalom told the Ambassador that he had "solved" the tax problem that Secretary Rice had discussed with him during their November 14 meeting and that this is not a problem for the USG anymore. He asked the Ambassador to convey the news to the Secretary.

19. (C) In response to an earlier query by Shalom, the Ambassador noted that the visa waiver program is only available to countries that have a two percent or less refusal rate. Since Israel has approximately an eight percent refusal rate, it would not be eligible. Shalom said that he believes that the Israeli-Arab applicants raise the refusal rate for Israel due to their relatively low socio-economic status.

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